

**Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success Meeting  
Sixth Meeting – January 17, 2013**

**9:30 am**

**Chicago: JRTC 15<sup>th</sup> Floor – Lt. Governor's Conference Room**

**Springfield: Stratton Office Building – Lt. Governor's Conference Room**

**Minutes**

**Springfield:** Lynn Haeffele, Candace Mueller, Diane Rutledge, Julie Wollerman

**Chicago:** Elaine Allensworth, Miguel del Valle, Stacy Davis-Gates, Rich Lesniak, Al Llorens, Jeffrey Mays, Jane Russell, Cathy Schaevel, Julie Smith, Jack Wuest

**Phone:** Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, Sen. Kimberly Lightford, Rhonda Jenkins, Vanessa Kinder, Early King, Melissa Mitchell, Victor Zimmerman

**Other Participants**

Chicago: Rene Crespin, Kye Gaffey, Sarah Myerscough-Mueller, Julie Smith, Adam Weiner

Springfield: Brittan Bolin, Lara Mbayed

**Minutes**

**I. Welcome**

- a. The Co-Chairs welcomed participants and led introductions.

**II. Review and Approval of Minutes**

- a. The previous meeting's minutes were approved.

**III. Update on DJJ Virtual High School Program**

- a. Julie Smith: I thought it was important to get an overview of the Department of Juvenile Justice program for high school students and an overview of their recent success with the blended program that allows them to offer on-line learning options.
- b. Kye Gaffey: Thank you for the invite. The PowerPoint is a guide to the process and what we've established. I was a school superintendent and I was also a principal at Auburn in Rockford. In our focus groups we have discussed issues with frustration our classroom program- even with the APEX recovery program. With the virtual high school, there is a huge difference in behavior. Our students said they felt bored in traditional schools and they did not connect to their classes. There was not enough differentiation in skills and ability and they often were causing disruptions. Getting buy-in for this idea is challenging because people are comfortable with the traditional high school experience and some feel that the structure is needed. Under this new model, there is a master teacher that teaches students in the classroom. Students are where they are supposed to be. We spoke with ISBE as we worked to develop and implement individualized instruction for our youth. The biggest piece of this model is tailoring appropriate curriculum to the individual. This fosters independence, and kids today are very independent. In this model, discipline incidents fell by 90%. I work with CPS and we have found that students prefer the alternative school setting and the flexibility of on-line learning. Our kids believe they will get in trouble if they go back to a regular high school. We are at a point in time where everything in society has changed, except for

school. So we wanted to change our schools. The range of knowledge needs to be greater. A virtual high school does not mean teachers are replaced. Our teachers are very busy and engaged with the students. They are walking around and helping students one-on-one. They can pull kids aside who might need extra help or are struggling. They can still do their dynamic lessons that they know are important for all students. Those things are still available to our teachers. I tell them that this is a tool that they can utilize. The lesson plans are already developed for them so they don't need to create them on their own - but they do need to know the curriculum to help their students. What I have seen from my teachers is a lot of new energy – their range of knowledge needs to be greater. We had over 700 classes completed in 6 months by 245 students. Our school that signed on most recently to the virtual program has now completed 70 classes in a month and half. We are seeing a lot of success in this area and we are working closely with CPS right now. They want to develop a bridge project to begin working with our transition team to continue this online education with job development. CPS came into our schools to see how we are running our blended program.

- i. Jack Wuest: Did you develop the curriculum?
  1. Kye Gaffey: We did not. We have two vendors that we utilize; it is the top curriculum. I went with the most dynamic vendor because I wanted it to have everything. We are using Pearson and Florida Virtual.
- ii. Jack Wuest: Are they aligned with state standards?
  1. Kye Gaffey: They are aligned with state and federal standards. The kids are eligible to compete in NAACP activities. A lot of schools utilize this for their AP programs because they don't have the teachers and enrollment in the area. I really think that for at-risk youth this is a huge asset. Right now we have half of our kids in the pilot program and now I'm thinking that 95% of our kids can handle it. I think this is one of the best tools available for special education because the teacher has complete control over how they want to implement the curriculum. They can adjust what the student needs to do and allow them to pass with at varied rates. You can exempt students from specific assignments or quizzes and tests. It really tailors the curriculum to the student.
- c. Julie Smith: I think this group would be interested in hearing a little more about the transition piece to this. How do you build that transition with the school they will be returning to, whether it's alternative or not, and how do you make sure they stay on the right track?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: DJJ is coming up with our own parole officer system called Aftercare. Each officer will have 25 kids to track. They will be the guardian who will go into the school and set up a system. Right now we connect with the school districts where we have students enrolled and we keep indirect touch with students. We have our virtual school teachers who are keeping track of where the youth are academically in their curriculum. They are in contact with the school counselor on the students' progress and we will send updated

transcripts saying that the student has completed coursework. It is based on the same concept as credit recovery. We have a paper we send out with every kid when they leave us with all the information that the school needs. Local schools can also have a discussion with the virtual high school principal and find out whatever they need to know on the student's progress. The biggest issue is keeping the student in the school because a lot of them don't stay. Currently, 11 out of 50 students who have been paroled have continued to use the virtual program. Almost all of the 50 told us that they would continue, but without the follow up of Aftercare it is very difficult. If I were in the school district, I would set it up so they continue with the online curriculum and would transition them slowly into the school system. The transition is the part that students struggle with and they often don't do well. They have been living in a secure facility and then they come to a wide open facility. One option is to transition them into the school for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the day, maybe for PE, a vocational, and an elective course – and allow them to continue with virtual coursework outside the regular classroom setting.

- d. Julie Wollerman: Who awards the high school diploma?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: Your high school district would award the diploma once the student transitions to the local school. They can get a diploma through DJJ if they stay. We award the basic 16 credit hour diploma.
- e. Miguel del Valle: Why don't they transition well?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: Because they need structure and without it, it is much harder for them to succeed than it is to fail. It can be much harder to stay successful with friends, family and teachers to deal with again. They may be coming into a class where they might already be behind and that's hard. The computer provides the same material and they're familiar with it so it's an easier transition.
- f. Miguel del Valle: What structural changes should a high school make to best facilitate the transition?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: It would help to have someone looking out for them, someone to get them from home. Having different transition times with a different bell system is a good idea. Schools need to look outside the box and the kids need to know that someone is out there that cares for them and that they can talk to. I have no proof in terms of data but I see success in focus groups. 9 out of 10 students said there's no way they could go back to their high school because of issues with other kids, or they feel stupid, or they have bad reputations. These kids aren't comfortable in a traditional high school setting. Like I said earlier everything's changed except education. We still have factory style schools.
- g. Early King: This virtual high school model does work, and we have data. I want to concur with what's been said.
- h. Members inquired about the training teachers need to properly facilitate this program.
  - i. Kye Gaffey: There's a 3-day training. They also have 38 extra hours of training over the next two years. I always start with Q & A because teachers have a lot of questions. In the beginning the teachers were skeptical but they hit the ground

running with the training and now we have 100% buy-in. The vendor is also great about helping teachers and they are able to email the vendors directly with any questions.

- i. Stacy Davis- Gates: Did you lose staff?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: No, I've actually increased my staff by a fifth.
- j. Miguel del Valle: Is the system aligned with Common Core standards?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: Yes, they follow all national standards.
- k. Stacey Davis-Gates: What is the goal of this program?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: I want to see at-risk kids get an education, no matter what their vocational skill, because without a high school diploma they can be paid minimum wage their whole life. I've spoken with Toni Irving about the need for education versus vocational training and the minimum wage element of that.
- l. Stacy Davis-Gates: I was actually offered a position as a master teacher but I didn't like it because we didn't have filters and there was a budget issue with the antiquated technology. I'm sure it's different from your setting though. I think education should be transformative; we want them to achieve but we shouldn't protect them from socializing with others and obstacles that will be there when they join the workforce.
  - i. Kye Gaffey: We have a strong Internet filter, but I made this my main education piece. I agree that this program isn't for all teachers but most of these kids are more social than other kids. They are always out in the hallways and they can socialize but it is structured socializing. In the transition this would be PE.
- m. Al Llorens: I applaud you for your successful program. What is the average class size?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: Our maximum is 15 – that's a contractual issue.
- n. Jeff Mays: Is your program statewide?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: Yes, it's in 7 DJJ facilities and will be in 6 once the Joliet facility closes.
- o. Jeff Mays: Downstate we have alternative schools and this would seem applicable in that setting. You went through a process for selecting vendors but kids with a 16-credit diploma are not eligible for the military – I'd like more information on your process and how it aligns with NCAA eligibility. Our high schools are not very controlled – we leave a lot up to our kids. It may be that there are some control things we should bring back that are more proactive and can help incent students.
- p. Elaine Allensworth: What do you think the expense is per student?
  - i. Kye Gaffey: It's \$300 per student for a 1-year license. The greatest expense is in setting up the wiring and technology but it comes out to about \$9,400 per student.

#### **IV. Continue Review and Discussion of Commission Report/Recommendations**

- a. Elaine Allensworth: Thank you very much, Kye. So Julie and her staff have provided guidelines on the recommendations.
  - b. Julie Smith: Several members sent follow up comments and we have tried to incorporate new suggestions and also provide a framework for guidelines. There seems to be an emphasis on outcomes from some members as opposed to programs. For example, districts would focus efforts on strategies that increase in freshmen on-track

rates or improve the graduation rate. Candace and Melissa talked about taking a look at what is already in place in terms of federal and state policies. We need to provide precise definitions as to measurements that assess outcomes. Some people talked about categorizing our recommendations into a 3-tiered structure. Can the state support this or other efforts consistently across all school districts? Some people advocated engaging parents and community members to achieve greater success. The We also have a divergence of opinion on whether we should specifically advocate for dollars. I leave it to the discussion here to decide that. They capture the ideas raised during and after recommendations were made.

- c. Jack Wuest noted the changes made to TAOEP and IHOPE funds.
- d. Julie Wollerman: It doesn't make sense to issue a report without addressing the fact that there are already existing programs in the state that are trying to address the issues.
- e. Miguel del Valle: Of course I think there would be unanimous support for increasing funding to existing programs. I think that's the easy part but we need to go beyond that. We had a discussion today about blended learning. We learned that individualized instruction small class sizes, and follow-up is extremely important but then we heard from our teacher here who said the problems with the lack of support and technology makes that model difficult to implement. So if it's not implemented properly it's not doing the job.
- f. Rhonda Jenkins: I just want to say schools can't support any more unfunded mandates.
- g. Elaine Allensworth: Working with at risk students within the different categories will take different resources for different students. We can look at programs that exist related to need.
- h. Al Llorens: I don't think we should shy away from saying more resources are needed.
- i. Miguel del Valle: I agree, but our charge is based on the joint resolution. We're tasked with examining a variety of things including evaluating graduation rates, mandatory attendance age, dual degree/credit options and shared learning infrastructure.
- j. Jeff Mays: We've got all the state agencies aligned. It's more of an alignment effort than anything else and using resources to make more of an impact.
- k. Miguel del Valle: I don't think the commission is ready to deeply examine how effective these programs are but I do know they're necessary and we don't provide enough resources. If we address all of these areas we'll be meeting our obligation under the law.
- l. Elaine Allensworth: I think we should talk about state initiatives.

#### **V. Other Business**

- a. The Commission determined that the next meeting would be devoted to honing the recommendations and finalizing them for the report. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 31.

#### **VI. Adjourn**

- a. The meeting was adjourned.